



## **you're in the wind, you're on my mind by everybreatheeverymove**

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**Summary:** (Paperman AU. Oneshot.) When down-on-his-luck Mike Wheeler meets the girl of his dreams by chance, he crafts a fleet of paper airplanes in order to catch her attention.

## **you're in the wind, you're on my mind**

It's a Friday, and Mike knows for a fact that the fifth day of the week is always the longest. He supposes it might have something to do with it being his last workday of any given week.

Really, he's rather grateful that his weekends are free. It gives him more time to sleep, and daydream, and write draft after draft of that novel he's never *actually* going to get around to finishing. And it's a damn shame because Mike *knows* that it would sell; that books would fly off of shelves like hotcakes and he'd never have to worry about his rent being overdue ever again.

Sometimes he likes to let his imagination roam, run wild, to see just how far it can stretch and just how ludicrous his ideas can be. And, while his friends like to humor him—and they never miss an opportunity to poke fun or tease him—Mike is sure they hadn't been lying when they'd said he could do it. Become a writer. Tell stories. He's always been imaginative, after all.

But, for now, he's stuck in an underwhelming, underpaying desk job. He handles tax sheets and numbers and data, and Mike would be lying if he said he didn't imagine quitting every single day of his life.

He's got on his usual slacks and matching jacket, black and bland and as plain as the day itself. His white shirt hasn't been ironed (because, yes, he forgot to iron it), and his the knot of his tie is too tight. His shoes need polishing, and he could probably, absolutely do with a hair-brush. At least he's clean and healthy, Mike thinks to himself with a slight tilt of his head.

How much simpler would life be if he didn't have to get up at the break of dawn every morning? How much easier would it be if he didn't have to venture into the city via public transport every single day?

How much happier would he be if he had a life, a real one, that he could share with someone other than the stray cat that crawls up onto on his balcony every evening?

How fantastical, how insane, would that be? How imaginative would he have to be to imagine a world like that? To think he could find meaning and love and-

A young woman speeds past him then, an arm outstretched as she tries to keep up with and catch the paper freely flying around the second platform.

A train has just pulled in to the station; the seven fifty-nine. It's heading out of the town, and Mike feels his body sway in the wind as the train cars slow to a stop behind him. A downside of being grotesquely tall: imbalance.

Mike watches as the paper stops its journey down at the end of the platform, spinning around a few times before graciously landing in the girl's open palm as if it knew she'd been chasing it. He averts his gaze (out of politeness) as soon as she snatches the paper back and starts making her way back down the platform.

The brunette stops just a couple feet shy of Mike, and she lets out a sigh as she collects herself, back straightening out and jaw clenching.

There's color to her cheeks as she shuffles her paperwork, most likely caused by the run she'd made to catch that one windswept, stray piece of paper.

She's wearing a fairly pretty blouse underneath her blazer, and a dark, tight-fitting pencil skirt hugs her frame, from her waist right down to her knees, flaring out at the edges by tiny slits in the sides. But the heels on her feet are a, sure enough, sign that she's heading somewhere fancier than the grocery store.

She has brown hair that falls down to her shoulders, waves turning into curls at the ends. It's brushed back behind her left ear, held in place by a blue hair clip.

She squares her shoulders before sparing Mike a glance. She bats her eyelashes (long and fluttering, and probably intentionally sexy), and she pulls the single file in her arms closer to her chest.

She gazes up at him for maybe two seconds or so, just long enough

for Mike to notice the honeyed color of her eyes and the Cupid's bow that seems to highlight the perfect plumpness of her top lip.

Noticing him staring back, the young woman quickly lowers her gaze, cheeks puffing out as a bashful smile works its way onto her face. She brushes her fingers over her hair, pretending to tuck a loose strand back behind her ear—it's already perfectly styled, even despite the run. Her mouth stretches into a shy, almost hesitant smile as she shoots Mike another look out of the corner of her eye, as though she's happy to have found him looking back.

Mike blinks, wide-eyed, empty hand flying up to the base of his throat to adjust his tie. Suddenly, he feels like he's suffocating. He yanks on the tight knot, knuckles white as he pulls the material loose. The black-haired young man swallows sharply, offering her a kind smile in return. The corners of his mouth curl into a grin when he spots her softly giggling to herself, timidly chewing at the inside of her cheek.

He shuffles from one foot to the other, licking his lips as he works up the courage to say something, anything—

Another train speeds past them then, a strong gust of wind in tow—it's the eight o' five, and it's two minutes early. Mike tightens his grasp on the folder in his left arm, tucking it safely into the crook of his elbow.

But a single paper flies free from the stack when the train passes, and before Mike can even reach for it, it's getting swept away in the breeze and flying away and... landing straight on the pretty girl's face.

Mike's breath catches in his throat, and he quickly extends an arm out to peel the paper from off the brunette's face. He pulls it off of her slowly, taking in the way her eyes are shut tight and her lips are puckered in surprise. Her nose is scrunched adorably and her shoulders are raised, probably in shock.

Just as he's about to apologize, profusely and awkwardly and with hands flailing about, her eyes flutter, open and she's staring up at him with a doed look on her face. But then her gaze shifts from Mike's

face onto the paper he's holding up, and she starts snorts. Only, this time, her free hand flies up to cover her mouth in modesty, and she quirks an eyebrow in amusement as another giggle escapes her lips.

Mike smiles back, momentarily in awe, but he quickly flips the paper around to see what she finds so funny. There's a bright red lipstick print on the left side of the sheet, and Mike gasps.

The young man chuckles to himself, heart swelling at the sight of the smile on her face and the rose blush covering her cheeks. He lifts his head, unruly hair falling in his face, meaning to apologize.

But the girl is gone, moving on, and Mike can all but watch in despair as she quickly hops on the train pulled-in behind them.

The brunette finds a seat by the window and, once she's placed her file down in her lap and taken a deep breath, she looks back at the platform.

She stares back at Mike, soft and almost apologetic, a small smile playing on her lips. And then she blinks, and something akin to regret crosses her features.

Mike just watches, dumbstruck, as the train departs, paper still held up between his fingers. It sways in the breeze as though it's waving, free and matching the pulsing rhythm of Mike's heartbeat.

(He'd be lying if he said he didn't consider running after that damn train.)

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Just as another stack of papers is dumped on his desk, Mike scoots back in his chair. He pushes away from his desk with the balls of his hands, arms stretching out in front of him.

His wrists click, and he drops the pen he's holding down on the desk. He watches as it rolls over onto the piece of paper already lying flat on his desk, and Mike sighs. He brushes the pen away before any ink can leak onto the paper, eyes focused solely on the perfect, almost heart-shaped stain by the signature box.

The lipstick print still hasn't faded in the slightest, but it's dry now.

It's as though the smudge is mocking him, taunting him and reminding him of what he couldn't have, what he might have missed out on.

Someone with a face as gorgeous as hers and a laugh as soft as hers was way out of Mike's standards anyway, surely. He's lanky with a long nose and spindly legs and a mop of black hair that just refuses to be tamed. But, still, a man can dream, can't he?

Shooting his boss a casual glare behind his back for good measure, Mike grips the handles of his chair. He presses his feet into the floor, trying to ground himself before even attempting to get back to work. But almost as soon as he's pulling himself back to his desk, he spots something out of the corner of his eye. Or, rather, he spots someone.

Quickly standing up, Mike whips around and presses his hands against the clear window panes. He's surely leaving fingerprints, but he doesn't care. Because, there, across the way... is that girl. That brunette with the sweet smile and the blush. The girl Mike thinks to be most beautiful of all.

She's sat in what looks to be a halfway across the street. Her hands are in her lap, and her ankles are crossed together as she waits for the other person in the room to finish speaking. Mike watches as she tucks her hair behind her ear, head held high.

His breath catches in his throat, and he gulps before starting to pull up the bottom of the window. Daring a look over his shoulder, Mike quickly scans the room. His colleagues are all working, too busy with their own tasks to pay him much mind. And his boss' door is shut. Mike will take that as a win.

He drags the window up, forcing it open despite its stiffness and his lack of upper body strength. And then before he can stop himself, he's waving and doing big, grand hand gestures. He waves his arms about, even going so far as to lean out of the window frame. But his brows only furrow in irritation when his attempts prove futile.

She doesn't notice him, not in the slightest.

Down at the other end of the room, there's a clearing of a throat, and

Mike whips around to see his boss sticking his head out of his office. The man, with his thick frames and his towering frame, is leaning back in his chair, sending Mike what can only be described as a warning look.

(Back to work, Wheeler.)

Mike licks his lips then, dropping back down into his seat. He runs his hand over his chin, elbow digging into the surface of his desk as he glances around him to find something to catch her attention. Really, he's got nothing but a pen and a tray and a piece of her and-

He swiftly plucks the top piece of paper from off the pile, and he starts folding it into a plane. He crafts it carefully, making sure the wings are flighty enough to take it across the street.

Once it's in shape, Mike steadies his wrist, reaches an arm out the window, and he sends it flying out into the morning sky.

It dips, twists, before eventually just plummeting down into the traffic below. So he makes another; it hits the window frame of the office she's now sat in before landing on a ledge, calmly swaying in the wind. It doesn't fall down though, so Mike isn't totally dismayed. If he just aimed a little more to the left...

So he makes a third plane, and another one, and then one more.

It's only when someone grabs his wrist, plane clenched between his fingertips, that Mike realizes his time is up.

Peering down at him over the rim of his glasses, his boss shoots him a stern look. He drops the younger man's arm with a grunt, quickly moving to pull the window firmly into place. He mumbles something Mike has no interest in hearing, and then he's stalking off back down to his office.

Not even five seconds pass before his door is shut, and Mike is back to folding his paper.

Ten sheets of paper later, he's finally managed to land a plane inside of the building facing him. Only, it's in the wrong room, and the man sat at the desk it lands on licks it up with curious eyes. He seems to

consider it with a smile for a moment before looking out of his window and catching Mike's eye.

Mike can't help but just wave his arms about with a shake of his head, mouthing 'no', and hoping the man doesn't shout anything across at him. To his luck, the bespectacled worker across the street only pulls a face and scrunches the paper up into a ball that he tosses out the window.

Some twenty planes after that, Mike is no better off than he had been to start with.

She still hasn't seen him.

Mike frowns, eyes rolling back in frustration as yet another paper plane lands on the window sill, perfect shape still intact.

Reaching back, he picks up another sheet from off of his desk. His hands are working twice as fast now, determination taking over as he holds the paper between his fingers and focuses, aiming for a spot just a couple of inches below the top of the window frame. If he misses *this...*

But almost as soon as the plane has left his hand, it's being blown away by a flock of birds, and Mike can all but watch in despair as it catches on one of the smaller, darker birds' wings. A sharp edge of the paper sends the animal into a spastic frenzy and it forces the plane to spin faster than a bolt of lighting, slowly falling down to the street below, swept up in traffic.

Mike observes, elbows digging into the pulled-up frame and brows furrowing, as the paper gets lost somewhere between a truck and a cab, now too far from him for Mike to see its final landing spot.

Having never been much of a quitter, Mike will be damned if he starts now if he gives up because of some stupid, flighty *paper*.

Even as a late teen—sudden growth spurt leaving him standing somewhere between five-nine and six feet tall — he'd refused to give up his car in favor of a newer, more spacious one. He'd told his parents—quote—"I will make it work for as long as *it* works."

And so he had fallen into a routine over the years, one he just hadn't ever been ready or willing to part with: he'd reach down for the handle, his head would hit the doorframe one-out-of-three times, and he'd have to move the driver's seat back whenever he took to the wheel if it wasn't already pushed into place.

More often than not, this resulted in minor back pain and a forehead covered with kiddy band-aids that were usually reserved for his little sister, but Mike had made a promise to himself. And once he'd left his hometown to finish his studies in the city—and only after he had landed himself a steady job and an apartment on the outskirts of Manhattan—his car had finally given up on him, all life finally drained from its mechanical carcass.

(He'd been taking the train into the city ever since.)

(Though he's never seen *her* before.)

Sliding yet another piece of paper from atop the pile with haste, Mike folds, tucks, and he purses his lips in concentration as he crafts the paper plane. Within seconds, it takes flight in direction of *her*—flying freely in the wind and... hitting the side of the building, just a few inches away from the open window.

The next one hits the other side of the window before tumbling down, and another just bounces off of the frame before slowly drifting down to its demise.

So he builds one more, and then another, and then another. Pretty soon, he's lost track of time, but he's kept count of the number of planes he's built.

And it's only when his fingers are starting to ache, dexterity giving up on him, that Mike forcefully sends a half-built plane flying out the window, arms falling flat to his sides.

Long fingers wiggling to stretch them out, Mike sighs, shoulders slumping. He breathes through his nostrils, eyes narrowing in frustration.

(Pull yourself together, Wheeler.)

Refusing to give up, Mike mindlessly reaches down to pluck another form from the tall stack, eyes focused solely on the young woman across the way. She's running her fingers through her hair now, combing long bangs out of her face and tucking them behind her ear.

Only, his palm ends up slapping the surface of his desk, fingers splayed out across a single sheet of paper. His paper tray tumbles to the ground with a clatter then, and the man working a few feet over moves his own paperwork aside as though to keep it safe from Mike.

One final piece of paper is left; there's a red, slowly fading lipstick print right by the signature box, and Mike sighs in dejection, staring down at the mark with furrowed brows.

### **Three hundred and fifty-three.**

It's the three hundred fifty-third paper, and it's the last one he has left.

And if this one misses her, if it lands anywhere besides the security of her hands, Mike is done—not by choice, but because fate has obviously willed it so. And who is he to interfere with destiny?

But then... hadn't it been fate that first placed them in each other's path? Fate, and a speeding train.

Taking a deep breath, he picks up the final sheet of paper from his now-empty desk. It slides across the wood with just the softest of sounds, but it bears the weight of a thousand books; a reminder that this is perhaps his last chance at ever catching her attention.

Running his tongue over his lips, Mike neatly folds the paper into a plane, smoothing over the edges with his fingers. He brings it up to eye-level, right brow furrowing in concentration as he lines the sheet up with the window across the street, aiming straight for the door behind her.

Leaning ever so slightly out of the window to shorten the distance, Mike's breath catches in his throat as a gust of wind roars passed him, the paper plane slipping from his fingers and falling prey to the cool breeze. He feels the chills of cool spring air run up his forearm then,

short hairs standing to attention from the breeze and the realization.

He internally shrieks, hands flying out further as though he can still catch it, fingers desperately reaching to grasp the piece. But it's gone, and it's flying away and out of his sight forever.

Glancing up at the window across the street, Mike's breath almost stops.

The young woman is shaking someone's hand now, nodding her head as they pull the office door open for her. She smiles politely, prettily up at the other person, making her way out the door with small steps. The door shuts behind her, and Mike can no longer see her.

Hands flying out to grip his own window frame in disbelief, he lets out a loaded sigh—his chest burning as he exhales the cool air that entered his lungs. He ducks his head, slipping into a momentary slumber. He drops down into his seat, letting it spin around until he's facing his desk, and the man stood in front of it.

His boss is stood before him now, a glare and a disapproving look on his face, though his expression is half-veiled by his glasses and a thick mustache. He's got another stack of papers in his arms, and Mike is almost certain it's a heavier, heftier, more grueling workload than the one he just so happened to waste out the window.

(A small part of him is regretting ever looking out of his window in the first place.)

Muttering something Mike can't make out under his breath, his sourly boss just walks away. His hands are clasped behind his back, steps slow, and he shoots Mike a warning look over his shoulder, authoritative but almost daring.

Glancing up at the clock on the wall behind him, Mike inwardly groans, eyes closing. He'd wasted so much time making those planes, and it had all been to no avail. He could have been working in that time, been halfway-finished by now, but instead, he had... Did he *really* consider it to be waste of time?

Mike purses his lips then, closing his eyes for just the briefest of

moments.

He can either take a chance on her, on this random young woman whose name he has yet to learn—if she even wants to share it with him—or he can sit up here in this eleventh story office, doing temp work he's overqualified and underpaid for.

Mind firmly made up, Mike hurriedly slides his chair back, soles of his shoes gliding across the glossy, tiled floor as he makes for the main entrance. He plucks his jacket from off of the coat rack beside the door, tossing it over his shoulder as he pulls the door open faster than a bolt of lightning.

Within seconds, he's out of his office and most likely out of a job. But he thinks he's *in* love so maybe he'll be fine.

She's gone.

By the time he'd made it to the ground floor of his office building, suit jacket hanging from his frame as he ran out the front entrance—fancy double doors swinging behind him, arms still outstretched from where he'd pushed it open—the girl was nowhere to be seen.

Mike runs across the street in an act of bravery (and total recklessness) then, arms flapping about as he tries to hold traffic. Turns out the road isn't as narrow as it looked from up on the eleventh floor, and Mike's already half-regretting his decision to try and cross the street in the first place.

Vehicles honk at him, one driver even going that extra mile and shouting obscenities out of his car window, but Mike presses on. He almost gets clipped twice (that old lady definitely sped up on purpose!) but soon enough he makes it across the busy city street.

And, though he's out of breath and on the verge of collapsing from a lack of even trying to breathe, the young man makes it right up to the mailbox outside the building she'd come from. He frowns, spotting the lone piece of paper sitting on top of the postbox.

Knowing his luck, he'd probably only missed her by a second or so. But there—right in front of him, practically taunting his foolish lover's

heart—is that *paper*; the one tainted by the imprint of her lips, the red stain a stark contrast to the crisp white plainness of the tax slip.

Swiping the plane in a fit of annoyance, Mike sighs. His shoulders slump, hunching forward even more despite his already messed up posture. He can practically *feel* all motivation, all drive to find her leave his body.

(Of course.)

(He's loveless and jobless and now recklessly hopeless.)

He sends the plane flying once again, only this time it takes flight for real and sets off down the street. It disappears from out of Mike's sight but he doesn't pay it much attention.

Resigned, Mike heaves out a heavy sigh before finally succumbing to defeat. His feet take charge, shuffling along the sidewalk with the soles of his black, neatly laced shoes dragging along the concrete. He starts to make his way down the street, hands clenching, fisting in the front pockets of his trousers.

(Might as well call it a day and hope for a better tomorrow.)

But then, just as he's silently apologizing for almost walking into a man—with his brows raised all innocently, and his lips pursed all tiredly—there's a piece of paper flying right at his face. Only, it doesn't hit him. It sticks to his chest, right against the tie hanging around his neck. And when Mike tries to swat it away, to brush it off and let it fall to the ground, it just *jitters* before flying right back up to him.

He quickly grabs the paper, recognizing it as one of the hundreds of planes he'd crafted some twenty minutes ago. Mike frowns as he takes in the object now held up between two fingers, eyes narrowing. The odds of it making its way back to him weren't exactly slim to none given he'd made so many of these planes but... The odds of *two* of them finding him again? Low.

And just as this thought crosses his mind, that maybe fate is nothing more than fortunate coincidence, another plane is flying right at him;

and it's followed by another. And another, and several dozen more.

The planes all start hovering around Mike, pressing up against him as though urging him to keep walking, to move on. He can all but gasp, mud brown eyes practically bulging out of his head as he tries to wrap his head around this; there are pieces of paper—shaped and folded—sticking to him like glue.

Seemingly pushed by some unforeseen force of nature, Mike stumbles forward, knees buckling as he tries to escape the tirade of planes that swarm him. But they keep flying, surrounding him, clouding his vision and charting him off-course from where he'd originally planned to go.

"What—"

Suddenly, he's flying forward. But before he can fall face-first and rely on his hands to push himself up, he's spinning around and being dragged back down the street by the swarm of paper planes.

(Even *he* couldn't have imagined this.)

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A fresh bouquet of lilies would look nice in her apartment, she thinks. Hands behind her back, El Hopper looks over the selection in front of her.

Leaning in to get a closer look at the flowers, the brunette finds herself suddenly jerking backward when a paper plane lands right in the middle of the bouquet she'd been eyeing. Curious, she inspects the piece of paper.

It takes her all of two seconds to recognize it. There's a distinct, *her*-shaped lipstick print on the left wing of the plane, and the young woman picks it up with narrowed eyes.

She looks it over thoughtfully for a moment, flipping it over in her hands and pursing her lips in confusion.

(That man... Had he...?)

But then the plane starts moving and, as soon as she's let go to let it

free, it's darting off down the street and toward the train station, leading the way.

(And who would El be to deny fate?)

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One thing she hadn't expected that morning was to be guided through the city by a single paper plane.

Eventually, the paper had slowed down just enough for her to keep up, and once she'd been encouraged (by a piece of paper, no less!) into stepping on the downtown train, she'd caught it between her hands and had refused let go since.

It just *had* to be leading her somewhere, surely. If not, well... what strange coincidence would it be that she finds this one, single, unique piece of paper again?

After roughly four minutes, the train pulls in at the stop she usually boards at. The paper plane dances around in her palms, though it doesn't fly away, and El takes that as meaning that *this* is where it had been leading her. Or, at the very least, this is a stop along the way.

But once she's stepped off the train, it stops moving and instead just settles in her hands as any regular paper airplane should. El frowns, peering down at the object at a loss.

Her questions are answered when a man appears on the opposite side of the platform—having stepped off of a different train—and he's covered head to toe in what looks to be paper planes.

El blinks back her confusion, watching as the paper planes circling the man fall to the platform floor almost as soon as he'd regained his balance. They land at his feet, unmoving. His back is still to her, but she watches in surprise as he wiggles free from the final planes and flicks black hair from out of his eyes.

(Him!)

The man whips around a second later, hands flailing. His hair's a mess now, and his clothes are more creased than they had been

earlier that morning. But the brunette finds herself blushing then, ears raising as the smile on her face widens.

Once he spots her, and his face is the literal picture of astonishment and awe, El takes a deep breath.

Tucking her hair behind her ear, she takes one tentative step forward. She cradles the paper plane safely between her fingers, holding it up with both hands and a sheepish (if not also slightly shy) looks on her face.

Mike can't help but return with a grin, lips stretching out as his smile beams down at her. He blinks, gaze refuses to lift from off of her face. She's just... *wow*.

"Hi."

El stares up at him with wide eyes, hazel, and kind, "Hi."